

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

**Farewell to Associate Professor Richard Hosking, 27 April 2012:**

**Transcript of Address by PhD Candidate**

**Adrian Thurnwald**

When I met Rick I was sitting, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. ‘Little friend of all the World’ they called me, back then, and I’m one hundred per cent certain they weren’t being ironic.

So I jumped down from the great gun – they say whoever holds that gun holds the Punjab – because, though I thought I knew all castes, I spied a man the likes of whom I had never seen before: nearly six feet high, lush and snowy hair, full white moustache like that of Fook Shing, the Chinese bootmaker in the bazaar. I learned shortly that his name in the tongue of his own people was Rick.

‘Ah,’ I thought then and there. ‘This man must be my Lama.’

My Lama spoke at length about journeys to unimagined places and of wisdom I had never known. Myself, being a rough boy of the bazaar, could not fathom this existence of his. My Lama seemed to lead a life almost completely detached from the Wheel of Things, the life of materialism and suffering I saw around me, and he was on a quest to find the River of the Arrow, where he said his own spiritual journey would be complete.

I accompanied this Lama for a time, becoming his Chela, and we travelled together down the Grand Undergraduate Road.

But the spiritual life was not the only one for me. When, journeying with my Lama, I also agreed to carry messages back and forth for a British officer, I became swept up in what is known as ‘The Great Game’. I was trained in spying and political intrigue for the British Empire, and in undertaking further missions I became separated from my Lama. I remember one of my early tasks. I was sent to Austria-Hungary, because I believe the men of the Tsar had interests there. To tell the story of my first mission I shall refer to correspondence I kept at the time, as I believe those letters lend a greater sense of immediacy.

3 May

Dear Mina,

Since I was sent to conclude that business in Transylvania I have had a most terrible time. The land seems truly bewitched. Thankfully at least the train deposited me on schedule at the Transylvania train station at 8:35 PM. But I tell you; my host the count is a most unsettling man. He towers before me, clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere. I am sure he is watching me as I creep about his mouldering house. Has he locked me within this castle of his? I cannot be sure. I swear I looked out the window last night to see him crawling vertically up a wall.

5 May,

Dear Mina,

It is with trembling hands I write an account of the horror I endured today, and I begin to doubt my own senses. That selfsame count of whom I spoke before caught me

Adrian Thurnwald. ‘Farewell to Associate Professor Richard Hosking’.

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trying the door, hoping to get out. He had his gypsies catch and bind me, and while I was unable to move he touched me on the cheek once with a hand more dead than living. As I lay tied in his study he knelt down beside me, and whispered into my ear the most bone-chilling words I have ever had the misfortune to hear:

Our Andy's gone to battle now  
'Gainst Drought, the red marauder;  
Our Andy's gone with cattle now  
Across the Queensland border.

He's left us in dejection now,  
Our thoughts with him are roving;  
It's dull on this selection now,  
Since Andy went a-droving.

I was paralysed with terror, and for a time the conviction of my helplessness overpowered all other feelings, but then I conjectured to the count that Banjo Paterson's 'In Defence of the Bush' was a far superior poem to Lawson's 'The City Bushman', and, while the count was driven mad by his own passionate proselytising, I slipped from my bonds and escaped. I ran, not daring to even glance back, and I was so swift my colourful scarf came loose from my neck and wafted behind me onto the branch of a pine, blowing gently in the breeze in that lonely forest, until a small bird plucked at the woollen threads and made a nest for its hatchlings — no, that didn't really happen; I just put that in because I know that errors in point of view are one of Rick's pet peeves.

Fleeing from the count I also stopped for a spot of fishing to help me overcome my vampire trauma.

The weight of my pack was heavy on my shoulders. It was a good weight. I opened my pack and found my jar of grasshoppers. They were good grasshoppers. They were black. They were good black grasshoppers. I felt manly. I felt good and manly. I put one grasshopper on my hook. The hook felt good between my fingers. I felt manly with the hook between my fingers. With these grasshoppers I hoped to catch a fish. I hoped to catch a good, manly — no, never mind; that fishing story is simply too boring to tell. I'll move on.

Anyway, I spent several years playing the Great Game, and then, unexpectedly, I crossed paths with my Lama again, in the mountains of Tibet. The river he sought, the river of enlightenment that would finally free him from the bonds of the earth, was, he said, on the plains, but he had become distracted. People always called upon him, and drawn back by the ties of the world, he had found himself wandering a little, for the last time, amongst the stones.

My Lama greeted me by calling out 'Sahib'.

'I am not a Sahib,' I said. 'I am thy chela.'

I marvelled to see my Lama again. He was a man with knowledge as wide and varied as the Punjab, his understanding of the holy texts as broad as all the world. He was a man who could teach without seeming to teach. Where again would we see his like, once he had freed himself from his earthly bonds?

And what of me? Was I to follow my Lama towards enlightenment, or was I to

return to the Great Game? The decision was mine. I watched my Lama growing smaller as he walked down the mountainside to the plains, where his river lay.

Not knowing my own fate, trapped halfway between the heavens and the earth, I sat, cross-legged and, under my breath, I wished my Lama the best of luck. 'The best of luck,' I repeated. 'I wish you the best of luck in finding your river.'

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